

Communalism in Modern India: A Theoretical Examination

by Dilip Simeon (published in *Mainstream*, Dec 13, 1986)

[NB – this essay was written 26 years ago, in the aftermath of the 1984 carnage of Sikhs in New Delhi. It was my first attempt at arguing that communalism was India's version of Nazism, and that it was a singular phenomenon with different religious (and mutually influential) expressions, rather than an arithmetic total of separately existing communalisms. The essay was published in several places, including Social Science Probings and the newspaper Patriot. It last appeared in Mainstream, and was posted on SACW till 2009, when I withdrew it in order to correct some glaring typographical errors. Most of these have now been removed, although some errors and/or insufficient details may remain in the main text as well as in the footnotes. I will try and remove them over time. And there are flaws and gaps in the argument that have been pointed out to me, or that I have noticed myself.

*I re-post the essay because despite the growth of historical knowledge and fresh theorizations of communalism, it marked (for me) a first attempt at understanding the single most intractable problem in South Asian political life. And as it happens, I stand by the main argument presented here, regarding the fascist nature of Indian communalism. Where the term **NB** appears in the footnotes, it signifies an addition to the original: **DS**]*

*A German, who would embolden himself to assert, 'two souls alas, dwell in my breast', would make a bad guess at the truth, or, more correctly, he would come far short of the truth about the number of souls: Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil**

Defining communalism poses a complex problem for historians in contemporary India. On the one hand is the barrier posited by the communal tradition itself, which has endeavoured, with considerable success, to reduce the 'nation' to the 'community'. The partition of India and the long history of Hindu Rashtravad (Hindu Nationalism) express the formidable successes of this tradition. On the other hand, there is a

historical (not merely historiographical) confusion between ‘nation’ and ‘community’, which underlies the evolution of the modern nation-state and the subjective reactions to the Industrial Revolution. For instance, Bipan Chandra’s definition – “Simply put, communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interests”¹ - could be rephrased to define the phenomenon of nationalism as well, leaving us none the wiser. Third, the object of our study distorts and challenges our chronological sensibility.

The substance of communal ideology is historical memory, manifested in myths, symbols and atavistic emotion. The function of communalism is mass mobilization for the authoritarian reconstruction of the state in crisis. This state is a precipitate of a medieval and a colonial past, but is also the organizer of capital accumulation in the context of a world economy. As ideology, communalism achieves the fusion of archaic and modern elements (mythologized memory and Rousseauesque notions of popular sovereignty). The state, too, expresses the fusion of the age-old specialization of power with the modern despotism of capital. A state riven by crises of legitimacy can quite easily and naturally turn to communal institutions and movements to secure an authoritarian popular base. When communalism achieves state-power, the distinction between community and nation seems to vanish, and the task of critical comprehension becomes even more difficult.

The problems do not end here. Communal ideologues possess the gift of speaking with several tongues in a reasonably straight face. Thus, in the Nehru Report negotiations in the late 1920’s, Muslim politicians from the Punjab could base their demand for communal reservations on the apparently democratic principle of proportional representation in the absence of adult suffrage. Hindu Sabha leaders could stress the secular demand for joint electorates while scarcely concealing their anxiety about the extension of the franchise to the less privileged classes, especially if these consisted of Muslims and ‘low’ castes. One type of communalist could be democratic but far from secular, another secular but hardly democratic.

¹... Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, p.1.

Another feature of the political landscape was the habit of belonging to several different organizations at once, some for speaking in a secular voice, and others for the communal one. Furthermore, since self-righteous innocence was (and still is) the emotional ground of every type of communalism, each saw itself as a mere 'reaction' to the 'communalism' of the other, and the air was often thick with ringing denunciations of communalism by communalists. Even among historians, therefore, this particular theme is steeped in sectarian emotion, and it is very difficult to bypass communal categories while studying it.

Compounding all this is a praxiological crisis. Communalism was never a stable, easily identifiable and tangible entity like, for example, the colonial state. It was, (and still is), a process, taking different forms in different geographical, cultural and chronological spaces; and, at all times, a political-cum-linguistic project, an endeavour. Strident calls for Hindu unity, Muslim unity or Panthic (Sikh) unity would scarcely have been necessary if the people known by such names had shown a spontaneous proclivity to be united along communal lines. Since the 'biradari' (caste) was a far more basic identity than the communal coalition, it appears that the call for communal unity was actually the pseudo-universalist attempt to *create* a communal interest; something which could tell us far more about the agency making it than about the 'community' whose 'interest' was sought to be represented.

Communalism was a self-positing and self-fulfilling prophecy, which established the truth of its categories by a protracted onslaught on democratic values and institutions, and measured its success in a creeping accretion of state power, and hegemony over the ethical fabric of society. Since communal attitudes pervade various reaches of the administration in the successor states of British India, any type of critical reappraisal of the process leading up to August 1947 puts the historian, willy-nilly, into a political stance vis-à-vis communalist ideologies, and this, needless to say, carries its own ramifications.

Let us note, at first, a semantic problem associated with the use of the word 'secular'. The Latin root 'saeculum' denotes the here and now, this-worldliness and contemporaneity. The dictionary defines 'secularism' as the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God, or in a future state. It defines the word 'secular' as pertaining to this world, and especially carrying a negative connotation, the exclusion of the religious element in politics, education, etc. (Ecclesiastically, a 'secular' clergy is one which lives outside monastic seclusion). There is a distinct tension between root and usage here, because the latter contains the false imputation to religion of a concern only with the after-life, ignoring the fact that religion has always been involved with the ethics of daily life.

So it could be said that religion has secular, or contemporaneous relevance, and that secular institutions – insofar as they are concerned with the maintenance of a social ethic – have always encroached upon the religious domain. The prime such social institution is the state, which is always contemporaneous. Hence priesthoods became the arm of temporal power, and the latter, historically, often claimed divine status. Even if one were to deny all delineations of the after-life, one would have to accept that religious doctrines carry weighty implications for 'secular' social life. In our own global present, a novel situation has arisen due to the destructive effect upon traditional morality of the phenomenon of accumulation for its own sake. Money-making undoubtedly breeds amoral and purely instrumentalist attitudes to social relations and this is what leads to the tension between the religious sensibility (which insists upon its contemporary politico-ethical relevance), and the so-called secular one, which apparently is concerned only with ensuring a stable environment for the needs of politics and commerce, and which is capable of instrumentalising all aspects of social life, including religion.

Institutionalised religion has bred priesthoods, a section of which has invariably allied with kings, landlords and tax-collectors in order to amass power and wealth very much in the here and now. But there has always been the element of the repressed in history as well. Thus, however much this world is all illusion, despite the sure promise of a

heavenly inheritance for the poor and the meek, and howsoever explicable one's current misery is in terms of the immutable law of 'Karma', nevertheless, often enough their own 'present' becomes intolerable and the plebeian population invent their own brand of religiosity, in the form of syncretic cults and/or millenarian movements, The sacral remains, but what is striking about it is its sharp disjunction with established religious orthodoxy. And it would be incorrect to reduce such movements to a dichotomised model of an 'essential' socio-economic interest, clothed, as it were, in religious garb. On the contrary, the popularity of such movements would depend precisely upon the unleashing of emotions and will power connected to religious convictions.

In its syncretic and millenarian form, popular religion can strike, at best, only an uneasy and temporary alliance with communal political interests. However, since both millenarians and communalists can play upon the *revivalist* sentiment, it is necessary to consider our use of this word a little more carefully. As a simple category, revivalism can be said merely to embody the appeal to established tradition, in an attempt to purify the ethical structure of the Present by a return to supposedly pure and pristine origins. But considered functionally, revivalism can represent widely disparate social currents. Thus, *what* is being revived, and by whom, becomes important.

The decay of Buddhism and the imperial traditions with which it was associated was accompanied by the gradual resurgence of the Brahmin priesthood. This stratum, for all its pioneering work in assimilation of food-gathering or pastoral tribes into settled agriculture, also contributed to the proliferation of ritual, rule by superstition, caste exclusiveness, and the localisation and autarky of material culture. D.D. Kosambi recounts the process related in some Puranas, known as the *hiranya-garbha* (golden womb) ceremony, by which petty chieftains and kings would acquire high-caste status, agree to maintain the *chaturvarnya* (the four basic castes) and convert the rest of their tribe into a new peasantry. "All this amounted to keeping down a newly created set of Vaishyas and Sudras by Brahmin precept and Kshatriya arms."² Often, respectable genealogies would be 'discovered' and written into the records. The use of Sanskrit as

².... D D Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, p. 171

the language of ritual helped create a pan-Indian intellectual elite, but the price of priestly parasitism was, in Kosambi's words, "an indifference to past and present reality...(which) not only erased Indian history but a great deal of Indian culture as well."³

Counter posed to this priestly culture was the body of differentiated heterodoxy known as shramanism (asceticism), whose innate hostility to the former grammarian Patanjali (ca 2nd century BC) likened to the enmity between the snake and the mongoose.⁴ The shramanic ethic tended to be universalist, even though its lay following fell victim to the caste system. The Bhakti movements, which spanned a long period from ca 500 AD onwards, were, in Romila Thapar's view, the inheritors of, the shramanic tradition, and were popular among the 'low' castes. (In a sense, one could say that they were a 'revival' of heterodoxy.) Although they differed widely depending upon time, place, social roots and types of worship, many of them were distinctly opposed to caste divisiveness and the notion of renunciatory salvation, and preached in the vernacular. They were alien to Brahmanism and some – such as the cults of Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikhism) and Kabir – were syncretic, being influenced both by the Sufi's notion of a direct relationship with divinity, and the older Indian tradition of non-dualism (Advait).

Meanwhile, with Islam had arrived the notion of the just and pious Sultan. In theory the Sultan could not be absolutist – he was subservient to and obliged to uphold the divine law (shariah). In practice, since the Sultanat was neither personal property (which would have to be shared among heirs), nor communal property, (which would have to be controlled by the faithful), religious law failed to ensure continuity on the basis of de-jure principles, and had perforce to postulate de-facto sovereignty.

Furthermore, the holy scriptures enjoined social equality, while orthodoxy at the same time upheld the principle of the supreme leadership of the learned ones; this despite the fact that Islam had never sanctioned a church or a clergy. Having no direct authority in

³... *ibid*, p. 174

scriptural matters, the ruler could only legitimise his rule by claiming to enforce the shariah; and this could only be done through the ulema. The latter had no means of inducing acceptance of their theological credentials except through the king. A symbiotic interest developed of a state-oriented clergy, who were also tied to the monarch through charitable grants. The tradition of a factional and ambitious ulema, bent upon inculcating among poorer classes of Muslims nothing more than a sense of conformity and inherent superiority, blended well with a culture already engrossed with status and ritual pollution. Orthodoxy, unable to establish the shariah as a normative principle, “made religion a poor dependent of politics and converted a source of moral nourishment into a parasite”⁵

However, establishmentarianism did not go unchallenged. An independent ulema also existed which refused to associate with the institutions of power. The mystics (Sufis) were even further removed from the legalistic tradition. Basing themselves on monistic concepts such as *wahdat-ul-wujud* (the oneness of being), and the union of the self with God, they put forward a more earthy and appealing rendering of the Islamic message. Whereas the orthodox ulema represented the authority of the state and of dogma, the Sufis could provide spiritual sustenance to ordinary people. In so doing, they also had to provide room for belief in the miraculous.

Whereas the state-oriented clergy could quote religious injunctions in favour of obedience to the ruler, equally could their critics use the precepts of conditional obedience, social equality among the faithful, and hostility to ostentation to express their rebellious instincts. An example of this was the Mahdawi movement begun by Saiyyad Mohammad of Jaunpur (1443-1504). Having established his reputation as a pious and learned Muslim, he performed the Hajj (1495), and proclaimed himself the Mahdi, or the expected deliverer. Despite the impact of his preaching, even upon officialdom, (some of whom were eager to use him as a political instrument), he remained committed to a life of severe austerity, and attracted a large following among the urban poor.

⁴... Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, p. 152

The Mahdawi doctrines, according to Mujeeb, “constitute a revolt against a social and economic system that claimed to be Islamic, but was patently based on exploitation and oppression”⁶. The jealous ulema, unable to worst him in discursive combat, concentrated on his messianic claims. Continual orders of exile, coupled with the Mahdawi accent on hijrat (migration) as a proselytising mission, led to the setting up of a number of egalitarian ‘dairas’ (circles) in several parts of western and northern India. The cult lasted till the late sixteenth century, dogged by orthodox and state persecution, which was natural, for if its teachings were to be accepted, the existing social and political system would have to be renounced as subversive of Islam.

Let us now consider developments under Britannic imperialism. The mercantilist interaction with India was already over a century old when colonial conquest began. The latter process took another century, in the course of which the political fragments of the moribund Mughal empire and various predatory polities were brought under a single new political and economic dispensation. Given the highly complex social hierarchies that existed in different areas, the long period of social pacification, the staggered pace of institutional change, and the fact that Britain herself underwent drastic historical transformation during this period, it is not surprising that the reaction to this whole process was highly differentiated.

Remnants of traditional ruling classes could oscillate between xenophobic resistance and collaboration, and the reaction of the plebeian classes could also suddenly change from passivity to rebellion. Similarly erratic was the intellectual adjustment. There was, after all, a traditional intelligentsia already in existence – the scholars, teachers, priests and officials of the pre-colonial order – and they possessed a certain inertia/stamina which derived, at least in part, from the gradualness of colonization. Their sources of livelihood were not immediately destroyed, nor was their world outlook suddenly transported into so-called modernity and secularism.

⁵... M Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, p 80

As a colonial middle class slowly emerged out of elements of the traditional intelligentsia and other propertied strata, a chaotic upheaval of values and norms took place. For such a situation, one must be cautious while speaking of revivalism and reformism, which were often enough meshed together in the ideologies of the middle-class collaborators. Collaboration itself might mean one thing in Bengal at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and quite another in Punjab at the end of it. Rammohun Roy's quotation of sacred texts in support of his campaigns for social reforms were accompanied by a completely different attitude to Western liberalism than similar citations by Dayanand Saraswati sixty years later. And all this would be yet a world apart from the mood of the righteous ulema in the same period.

A glimpse at the normative universe of the colonial intelligentsia might be revealing. One current within the ulema, for example, was gripped by a nostalgic reaction to the passing of Islamic sovereignty. Shah Wali-allah (1703-62) sought to put the blame for the decrepitude of the sultans upon the impurities which had crept into the practice of Islam, and he castigated the Sufis and polytheistic (Hindu) influences. His son, Abdul Aziz, declared British territory *dar-ul-harb* (land of war), but, paradoxically, permitted the study of English and Western art and science. Saiyyad Ahmad Bareilvi (1786-1831) took the logic of *dar-ul-harb* to its conclusion by insisting that the faithful wage holy war (jihad). Modelling himself on the life of the Prophet, he tried to recreate *dar-ul-Islam* (land of peace) on the north-western boundaries of the Sikh kingdom, and died in battle in 1831.

This "Wahhabi" movement, named after an Arabian revivalist school of thought, reverberated throughout North India for another three decades, and succeeded in mobilizing considerable support among the artisans and ulema. After the destruction of its underground network in the 1860's, the Government commissioned the official, W.W. Hunter, to examine the conditions and religious obligations of Indian Muslims. He went so far as to term the Wahhabis "extreme Dissenters in both respects;

⁶... *ibid*, p. 106

Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchy men, so to speak, touching matters of faith; Communists and Red Republicans in politics”. He also surmised that upper class Muslims would be more amenable to “the sober and genial knowledge of the West”.⁷ Sajjad Zaheer summed up the movement as ‘but a futile attempt to re-establish a reformed Muslim feudalism’⁸.

Despite this and the debacle of 1857, the nostalgic revivalist mood remained intact among the ulema who regrouped in the famous seminary known as the Dar-ul-Ulum at Deoband (established in 1867). Their activities centred around providing religious guidance and instruction to the respectable yet declining lower middle classes of pre-industrial society, for whom the possibilities of fruitful collaboration were minimal. The Deobandi ulema denounced all attempts at absorbing Western science and English. They despised the Aligarh Westernisers associated with the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental School (established in 1875). Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi in 1888 issued a ‘fatwa’ (a conventionally binding opinion) denouncing Saiyyad Ahmad Khan, the doyen of the Aligarh reformers, and asking the faithful to support the Congress.⁹

It is significant that Deoband bitterly opposed the Pakistan Movement of the 1940’s through its platform, the Mamiyyat-al-ulema-I-Hind, which insisted, at a conference held in April 1940, that India was “the common homeland of all its citizens irrespective of race and religion who are joint owners of all its resources...From the national point of view every Muslim is an Indian”¹⁰. It also considered the Muslim League’s hostage theory (according to which the presence of sizeable minorities on both sides of the border guaranteed fair treatment to Muslims in India and to Hindus in Pakistan) political nonsense and as contrary to holy law. This kind of communal self-assertion, therefore, arrived at a nationalist stance precisely because of its revivalism and social conservatism.

⁷... Quoted by P Hardy in *The Muslims of British India* p. 87

⁸... S Zaheer, Recent Muslim Politics in India, in *India and Contemporary Islam*, Vol.6, S T Lokhandwalla ed.

⁹... P Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 174

¹⁰... Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, p. 97

Men like Abdul Latif and Sir Saiyyad Ahmad Khan, on the other hand, represented an intellectually more liberal but politically conservative layer of society, anxious to learn from the West in order to strengthen its position in the colonial system. Holy war was, by this time, arguable a mirage, and the community had to fortify itself though loyal tutelage to the foreigner. But when these upper class Muslims spoke of their communal interest, they meant the interest of the *ashraf* (elite), hardly the illiterate mob. Now despite the ideological chasm between the revivalist clergy and the reformist literati, a common feature remained, their intellectual elitism; and it was this that gave both, adaptability to the needs of latter-day political movements. Reformism and revivalism tended to fuse together in the crucible of democratic politics to produce various communal alloys (the reference is not merely to Indo-Islam), which, unfortunately, remained very much a part of the nationalist movement.

Responses to the challenge of Western civilization were made on the basis of the historically given social identities. Aristocratic elements of various denominations were apt to remind the new rulers that they were their immediate predecessors and, after 1857, were patronized by the British. The Brahmins of Maharashtra identified closely with the Peshwa confederacy, which was reduced as late as 1818. Since the reactions of the Indian aristocracy included, at various moments both fierce resistance and fawning collaboration, the bearers of autocratic tradition, even when sociologically *not* feudal carried with them an ambiguity of approach. Sometimes even an autocratic symbol could be used for socially radical purposes. Thus Jotirao Phule (1827-1890), the pioneer of low-caste radicalism in Maharashtra, depicted Shivaji as a Sudra King whose descendants were wronged by the usurping Peshwas, who were Chitpavan Brahmins by caste. (This was in marked contrast to Tilak's version of the same ruler – here, Shivaji was the “Gau-brahmin-pratipalak”, or ‘protector of cows and brahmins’ that is one who accepted orthodox conventions, especially the elitist Brahmanical tradition.)

Phule issued bitter diatribes against the iniquitous and ‘alien’ Brahmins’ culture, which had maintained a monopoly over education and power for generations, and denounced all upper-caste reform activities as attempts to perpetuate Brahmin supremacy. He saw

the Indian National Congress in much the same light (as did Sir Saiyyad Ahmad Khan). Phule wished to use the colonial system as a god-given mechanism which would enable the long-despised sudras to attain dignified human status by acquiring the new learning and eschewing political opposition. This ‘self-strengthening’ syndrome was, of course, a familiar refrain, and had been sounded by upper-caste Bengalis a whole generation before him.¹¹

In the early nineteenth century, some of the most outstanding representatives of the Bengali middle classes were strongly influenced by the vibrant democratic liberalism then emanating from Europe, including the ideals of Tom Paine, the French Revolution, and the Greek war of independence. Even at that stage the ideas of a person like Raja Radhakanta Deb remained within the mould of self-strengthening orthodoxy – social conservatism combined with an openness to Western education.

Gradually even the liberal reformism of Raja Rammohan Roy’s Brahmo Samaj movement and the more radical Derozian current lost their youthful élan. Leading Derozians such as Pearychand Mitra and Dakhinranjan Mukhopadhyaya began to speak of the benefits of English rule which had liberated India from ‘Muslim Tyranny’. In 1845 Rammohan’s successor as leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Debendranath Tagore, was using the Tattvabodhini Sabha to vindicate Vedic doctrine. In 1851 he agreed to be the Secretary of the British India Association, whose President was Radhakanta Deb, Rammohan’s lifelong arch-conservative opponent and the man who had hounded Derozio out of Hindu College, Calcutta in the late 1820’s, for corrupting the minds of the youth.¹²

¹¹.... For Jotirao Phule’s movement and ideas, see Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society – The Brahmin Movement In Western India, 1873-1930*, Chapters VI-X; and Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste Conflict and Ideology*

¹².... Shivnath Shastri, in his *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, tells us that by 1845 the Samaj under Debendranath espoused Vedantism as its religious doctrine during the controversy with Christian missionaries. MK Haldar in his introduction to Bankim’s tract *Samya* (*“Renaissance and Reaction in 19th Century Bengal”*) remarks that Debendranath’s appointment of Keshabchandra Sen as his successor in 1862 was probably the first time that an English-educated Hindu talked of ‘the Voice’ in matters public, something not mentioned even by the arch-conservative Radhakanta Deb. “Subsequently ‘the voice’ became a sort of crutch with all the neo-Hindu spiritualists and their apologists.” By 1859, the Tattvabodhini Sabha, one of Calcutta’s leading rationalist intellectual societies, had been made to merge with the Brahmo Samaj. The radical liberal Akshay Kumar Datta had severed his link with this society

By 1857 these attitudes had crystallized. During the great rebellion, the Calcutta newspaper *Hindoo Patriot* in its edition dated June 11, 1857, advised the educated natives to be loyal: “In three more generations they will have the best part of the property of the country in their hands...for all political purposes they will be the people...they have a splendid future before them, but which can be realized only by the continued existence of British rule.” Iswar Chand Gupta, editor of the *Sambad Prabhakar*, denounced the rebellion as a re-establishment of Muslim rule. On June 20, 1857, he wrote: “This (English) rule is as blissful as the rule of Ram...we are all getting our fulfilment in all aspects of our life as children by a mother under the aegis of the ruler of the world, the Queen of England... Let the goddess of British Raj remain steady and let us enjoy the heavenly bliss of independence forever.”¹³

Both Iswar Gupta and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyaya were elder contemporaries of the famous Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-94), literateur and nationalist. He is known to have held them in reverence. Staunch social conservatives, they suffered from what one writer has called “Anglophilia-cum-Muslimphobia.” For them the antinomy of a dark medievalism versus enlightened modernity was represented as Muslim tyranny versus English progress.

The conservatism of the aristocratic leaders of the rebellion of 1857 was more organic – theirs was not so much religious revivalism as political nostalgia. The attitude of the Bengali ‘bhadralok’ (gentlefolk) of that time was far more complex – simultaneously orthodox and pro-British (that is, pro-modernisation), that marked the beginnings of *communalist* revivalism. Gradually, sections of the revivalist phalanxes were taken over by the neophytes, whose knowledge of and affinity with the West drowned out the more simplistic refrain of the ‘Return to the Golden Age’. Thus, in the early twenties of this century, we find the Sanatan Dharma Sabhas coalesced with their arch-enemies, the

and its journal, *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, in 1855. D K Biswas, in his article on Debendranath in Atul Chandra Gupta (ed), *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, mentions two specific results of the activities of this society: the inspiration to the Hindu nationalism of Rajnarayan Bose and Nabagopal Mitra (Hindu Mela, etc), and the all-India outlook of the British India Association (est. 1851). The revivalist ancestry of nationalism is the point being made.

Arya Samajis in the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Deobandis with the despised ‘nacharis’ (pejoratively, rationalists) of Aligarh in the Khilafat movement.

This is not to imply that there were no reformers equally enamoured of British rule, or that their work was obliterated. The gentle but radical reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar fought a valiant but losing battle against orthodoxy. Himself a Brahmin, he disseminated a literature of knowledge and information rather than a polemic of power, campaigned ceaselessly for the social and educational upliftment of women, and retained a critical attitude to classical philosophical tradition, comparing the ‘false systems of Vedanta and Samkya’ with the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, whose introduction into the curriculum at Sanskrit College he opposed on the ground that it would encourage obscurantist self-congratulation. But he also despaired for his society: “If I had an idea of the worthlessness, dishonesty and lack of integrity of the *baralok* (high and mighty people: DS) of our country, I might perhaps not have ventured on this movement.” (He was referring to the cause of widow remarriage.)¹⁴

His close friend, Akshay Kumar Datta, went further than him philosophically, stood for iconoclastic ideas in religion, radical socio-economic reforms and even the programme of land to the tiller. This rational humanist reformism lingered on, affecting intellectuals in other parts of the country, (the names of G G Agarkar, M G Ranade, R G Bhandarkar and Behram Malabari come to mind) and the moderate trend in the Congress. But as political moderation became discredited, so did social reformism and the critical attitude to Indian society and tradition.

These transitions were staggered, discrete, and complex. Contradictory tendencies could often be found in the same person. One transformation is, however, stark enough to bear mention. In 1879, Bankimchandra wrote a brilliant tract on Equality called *Samya*. In this, he condemned the Brahmanic tradition for inculcating social inequity, superstition and ignorance. “India had been put to sleep by books of Vedic Dharma.

¹³.... Quoted in M K Haldar, *op. cit.*, p. 131

Who will save them from the tyranny of the Dharma Sastras? Who will give life to the Indians?”¹⁵ He denounced the oppression of sudras and peasants and was especially biting in his comments on the hypocritical treatment of women; referring to the Bengali family as a ‘menagerie’.¹⁶ He referred to Brahmins as the priests of ‘pseudo-religion’ who had entangled all the other castes in “the expanding net of sastras and rituals”.¹⁷ In the process, he claimed, “the mind of the Brahmin had become a desert”.¹⁸

But only a few years later, he called *Samya* a mistake – “it sells well but I will not reprint it anymore.” His fervent nationalism could not co-exist with social reformism, and he developed an ethical populism which amounted to a defence of orthodoxy. Three years after *Samya*, the famous novel *Anandamath* appeared, whose moral was, clearly, that the Hindu nation ought to learn from the British in order the better to confront the Muslims. British rule was more acceptable than the latter. Romesh Chandra Dutt, in his article on Bankim in the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, said of this book that “although in form an apology for the loyal acceptance of British rule,” it is nonetheless inspired by the ideal of the restoration, sooner or later, of a Hindu kingdom in India.

It may be of interest to note that four years prior to the publication of *Samya*, had appeared a novel entitled *Svapnalabhdha Bharatvarser Itihas* (The History of India as revealed in a dream) by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyaya, Bankim’s elder contemporary. This text constructs a fantasy of a victory for the Maratha forces in the third battle of Panipat (1761) and the subsequent resurrection of a Hindu Empire in India under a mythical King Ram Raja. Castes and classes co-exist harmoniously thenceforth under a paternalist absolute monarchy.¹⁹

¹⁴.... Letter to Dr D C Banerjee, quoted in Gopal Halder, *Vidyasagar – A Reassessment*, p.47

¹⁵.... Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, *Samya*, translated by M K Halder, p.154

¹⁶.... *ibid*, p. 202

¹⁷.... *ibid*, p.186-188

¹⁸.... *ibid*, p. 186–188

¹⁹.... Cf. Partha Chatterjee in “Transferring a Political Theory”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 18,

The jargon of Hindu Rashtravad had begun in right earnest. In *Bharat Kalanka* (The ignominy of India), Bankim wrote: “In history only twice there were attempts to establish a nation within the Hindu Society. Once, Sivaji in Maharashtra sang this, sacred hymn. Maharashtra woke up at his lion’s roar. The magician of the second time was Ranjit Singh, the spell was Khalsa (and) as the bonds of nation-hood became tighter, even parts of the land of the Pathans came under the Hindus.”²⁰ All this sounds sadly ironic today.

By the end of the nineteenth century the uneasy co-existence of the reformist and revivalist imaginations was over. At this time in Punjab even the need for reform could not be articulated without strongly revivalist overtones. Swami Dayanand Saraswati’s ideas combined iconoclasm with revivalism. Thus, while attacking the Brahmins for degeneration, corruption and obscurantism, he retained the notion of Brahminism and justified classical caste divisions. Deftly adapting pristine Brahmanical elitism to the modern concept of meritocracy, Dayanand’s ideology appealed primarily to the self-respect of the nouveau-riche commercial and professional caste Hindus of the Punjab and the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). This was its social base. Politically it (the Arya Samaj) was able, in its earlier stages, to mesh both with the nationalist mood as well as the desire among certain sections of the plebeian castes/classes for social upliftment and dignity.

But it was precisely because the Arya Samaj combined an elitist outlook (Brahmanvad) with the social/political aspirations of a commercial/capitalist elite, that it lost its reforming zeal to end up rubbing shoulders with its sworn enemy, the Sanatan Dharma Sabhas, in the joint communal front, the Hindu Mahasabha, in the second decade of this century. (To put it another way, its reformism contained the potential of being *co-opted* into communalist politics, and this is exactly what happened). It is significant that when a split took place among the non-Brahmin reformers in Maharashtra in 1920-21, the prince, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, chose to join the Arya Samaj (which had little

support in Maharashtra), rather than the far more popular Satyashodhak Samaj.²¹

Satyashodhak Samaj was socially radical, completely rejected Brahmanical elitism, developed its own historical myths, and even sought to adopt Tilak's Shivaji and Ganapati festival to its own, anti-Brahmin politics. Leaders of the Samaj were to write, in the mid-twenties, two books: *Deshace Dushman* (Enemies of the Nation), by Dinkarrao Javalkar and R N Lad's *Marathyanche Dasiputra* (Maratha's Bastards).²² The first referred to Tilak and Chiplunkar, the two outstanding Hindu nationalists of Maharashtra, and the second to the Peshwas, the Chitpavan caste-dynasty which dominated the Maratha confederacy in the eighteenth century and the symbolic heroes of many revivalists. The upper-caste outcry caused these books to be proscribed by the Government, and they remain proscribed to this day. Despite doctrinal inconsistencies and the fact that it soon threw up its own elite, it remains true that the Satyashodhak Samaj, before the emergence of the Gandhian Congress, commanded the unequivocal loyalty of the lower castes and rural masses in Maharashtra.

The late nineteenth century was the seeding time of political extremism within Congress as well as what we now recognize as communalist politics. In Balgangadhar Tilak (the Lokmanya), autocratic revivalism and nationalism were inseparable. In a speech to the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal made in the early 1900's, he extolled the greatness and strength of India in Vedic times, located its common culture in the Gita, Vedas and Ramayana, and spoke of the need to consolidate all sects into a "mighty Hindu nation". "For some two hundred years," he continued, "India was in the same condition as it is today. Buddhism flourished and attacks were made on Hindu religion by Buddhists and Jains. After six hundred years of chaos rose one great leader Shankaracharya", whose preachings "swept away Buddhism from the land"²³.

The same Tilak could claim, in another place, that "to look upon Hinduism and Buddhism as two different religions was a mistake. Buddhism should be regarded as

²⁰.... M K Haldar, *op cit*, p. 140

²¹.... Cf. Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt*, p. 130

²².... *ibid*, p. 238

reformed Hinduism.”²⁴ The rules of one type of communal propaganda were now emerging. Any decline of the priestly tradition signified a dark age. It was not the Shramanic tradition which defined Indian nationhood, but the Brahmanic, orthodox one. For purposes of propaganda, long dead heterodoxies could safely be assimilated to a loudly proclaimed eclecticism, by juggling around with the laws of logic.

Tilak's social conservatism is well known. He invented the Shivaji and Ganpati festivals in the late nineteenth century as a means of constructing a controlled Hindu communal front; viciously opposed the Age of Consent Bill outlawing marriages for girls less than twelve years of age; succeeded in severing the connection between the Congress and the National Social Conference in 1895 (even causing its sessions that year to be violently disrupted); refused acknowledgement to an appeal addressed to him by Bombay's Untouchables for support in their temple-entry programme; and, in 1918, opposed Vithalbhai Patel's Bill for validating inter-caste marriages on the ground that it was anti-Hindu and especially anti-Brahmin. He ended up by appealing for official votes to shoot down the Bill.²⁵

All these intellectual transformations did not take place in an insular environment. The nineteenth century saw a sea-change in British policy, from utilitarian reform to a pragmatic manipulation of reactionary elements and ideas in Indian society.

Simultaneously, Britain became the paramount power both in India and the world. The ideals of 1789, 1830 and 1848 faded away as imperialism swept through Africa and Asia, a process in which Indian soldiers participated and by which the intelligentsia was deeply affected. Notions of racial potency and strength gained currency.

Quite significantly, the theory of the 'Aryan' racial origins of Brahmanical civilization, given credence by Western Orientalist scholars such as Professor Max Mueller (Oxford philologist between 1868 and 1875), gained much popularity among diverse sections of the nationalist intelligentsia, including Vivekananda, Tilak, Justice Ranade, Dayanand

²³... Balgangadhar Tilak; *His Writings and Speeches*; Ganesh & Co.; Madras, 1922; 36-37

²⁴... D Keer, *Lokmanya Tilak*, p.398

²⁵... *ibid*, p. 387 and 404

Saraswati, Keshab Chandra Sen, Aurobindo Ghose, Bankimchandra and B C Pal. The theory could make the Indian elite feel equal to the ruling Englishmen (especially as it was certified by an Oxonian professor) as well as buttress their social superiority over the low-caste Sudras. Numerous essays in historical sophistry were written on this basis.²⁶

The arrogance of the paramount power was sought to be countered by the assertion of an older tradition of paramountcy with which various strata of the collaborating intelligentsia could identify.²⁷ This was its links with the pre-colonial polity came into operation. Some groups, like the Northern Indian ulema, or the Maharashtrian Chitpavan literati, retained a relatively recent historical memory of military resistance to the British. What they harked back to, therefore, was pre-colonial autocracy, a tradition of priestly association with state-power (whether Brahmanic or Islamic), the Brahmanic rather than the Shramanic, the orthodoxy of Shankara rather than the heterodox syncretism of Kabir or Nanak, the Sultan rather than the sufi.²⁸

These became the emotive principles around which they began the mobilization of popular support for the historic demand of national sovereignty. Diverse social classes and groups perceive and articulate their interests differently, and hence nationalism has

²⁶... See Joan Leopold, *The Aryan Theory of Race*, IESHR June 1970

²⁷... "Bankim provided the sheet anchor of Hindu nationalism. Members of the English educated section of the Hindus came from the families of office clerks, factory supervisors, small time lawyers and professionals, dilettante small land-holders who lived on the labour of others and with their strong romantic dispositions soon swelled the ranks of the Hindu nationalists." (M K Haldar, Introduction to *Samya*, p. 109). Representatives of the upper-Indian Muslim aristocracy and professionals, who comprised the main part of the Simla Deputation to Lord Minto in October 1906, used the words 'race' and 'community' interchangeably, and reminisced about 'Mahommadan' sovereignty.

²⁸... The hostility with which proto-communalists viewed popular folk religion is aptly demonstrated by the manner in which Gyani Ditt Singh of the revivalist Singh Sabha movement censured the syncretic cult of Pir Sakhi Sarvar, a medieval Muslim divine much adored by Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims alike. In his excellent article on 'the Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarvar' presented at the XVth Congress of the *IAHR*, Sydney, 1985. Harjot Singh Oberoi remarked, "that the elite socio-religious movements of the nineteenth century, like the Singh Sabha and the Arya Samaj, sought to suppress popular culture by deprecating the beliefs, symbols, rituals and other elements which went into its making. This opposition to popular culture was not purely due to rational and modernistic considerations, but also had to do with the 'mechanics of power' ...and with the articulation of a hegemonic elite culture." (NB: A more detailed discussion of the Sarvar cult may be found in Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*; University of Chicago Press; 1994)

always contained both social-democratic and autocratic potential, depending on the nature of the national coalition and the forces which gain political hegemony within it. (As a diversion, one could reflect on the connection between the *lebensraum* demanded by Adolf Hitler and the yearning for *Grossdeutschland* among certain German romantics in the mid and late nineteenth century.)

In India, revivalism was an integral ideological component of early nationalist attitudes, (though not necessarily of the ideas of all nationalists). With gradual enfranchisement, the intensification of power politics and the possibility of mass movements taking a social-democratic turn, this revivalist element in nationalism was discretely transmuted into a kind of Right-wing, obscurantist populism, which attempted to construct communal coalitions and agitations for specific political ends.²⁹

The nationalism of the Arya Samajis, the Deobandis, the Tilakites, the Khilafatists, the Akalis, the Muslim Leaguers, till the 30s, and the insidious popularity of Hindu nationalism among leading figures in the Congress, demonstrates the communalist/nationalist inter-connection mentioned above. While the broad nationalist coalition known as the Congress was able to make significant and historic inroads against the colonial state, nevertheless it must be remembered that August 1947 was as much of a tragedy as a triumph for Indian nationalism, which fell victim to its own political and class limitations. It is not the susceptibility of this or that leader to communal ideas that is being referred to, but the contradictions within the very concept of nationhood, which, by its language, mystique and social leadership, destroyed the possibility of a united, democratic nation and a composite culture.

I am not suggesting that the other, more democratic current did not exist. The non-Brahmin movements of the west and south, the social-democratic trends of the post-1918 era, the autonomous peasants and tribals' movements, and the Gandhian attempt at synthesizing these within a new type of mass organization, exemplified the more

²⁹... For an extensive survey and analysis of such a coalition, see Gyan Pandey, Rallying Round the Cow, in

human face of Indian nationalism. But communalism was its alter ego, working at every stage to undermine its regenerative potential. As an *internal* weakness, it functioned as an ideological Trojan horse, which corroded mass movements and soon developed stable organizational forms. Because Gandhi attempted the near-impossible task of *bridging* the autocratic with the democratic, the Brahmanic and the Shramanic, revivalism with secularism, he failed in his dearest ambition, namely, the maintenance of Hindu-Muslim unity. Only a Shramanic form of nationalism, based on a syncretic definition of Indian culture, and the social-democratic aspirations of economically and socially oppressed Indians, could have preserved national unity – perhaps the very representation of this unity in ‘Hindu-Muslim’ terms was an expression of failure.

Gandhi’s ambivalence had, of course, a political function. The maintenance of a national united front required that divisive issues not be raised. But this strategy weakened precisely those social forces, which could have resisted the much more dangerous, communal divisiveness, that ultimately led to Partition, slaughter and disruption on a unprecedented scale. Thus, for instance, did not the failure of the Congress to espouse a radical agrarian programme in the Punjab and Bengal provide scope for the unfolding of communal propaganda? This Janus-like character of Gandhism reminds one a little of Lenin, who, between 1918 and 1921 attempted to synthesise the ultra-democratic currents associated with the upheaval of 1917 with the needs of Party dictatorship during the civil war and after.

A great Congress secularist came close to the truth when, in his report, on the Kanpur Riots of 1931 (Pandit Sunderlal’s Report on the Kanpur Riots, published 1933), he defined communalism as “nationalism driven into religious channels”. This statement has the merit of pointing to the close link between the two. Because communal conceptions had become so endemic to nationalist consciousness by the early twentieth century and because this consciousness was so obsessed by conflicting autocratic traditions, the very ideal of national unity could only present itself to the nationalist intelligentsia in the form of the slogans of communal unity. Free India, in his concept,

could only be a federation of communities. At the height of the Khilafat movement, when Gandhi saw fit to align Indian nationalism with the cause of a decrepit Ottoman caliphate, even the most nationalist of the Deobandi ulema could not conceive of the future of the *millat* (the community) in free India as anything more than an existence within a juridical ghetto, “a Pakistan of fiqh and shariah”, as P Hardy calls it.³⁰ And the most broad-minded of Congress leaders could not but instinctively interpret the neutral term ‘majority rule’ as a communal majority, thus perverting the very concept of democracy long before adult suffrage was ever realized.

Because of these contradictions, the self-critical currents in society were much weakened. Individuals like the great poet Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) went through the same transition that Bankimchandra had done earlier – the author of the nationalist hymn *Tarana-I-Hind*, the social critic who could say of his fellow Muslims - “an infidel before his idol with wakeful heart / is better than the religious man asleep in the mosque”; the idealist who could castigate India’s Muslims for their resignation and conformism, ended up, in the 1930’s denouncing democracy, openly expressing his admiration for Hitler, asking for government intervention against the heterodox Ahmadiyahs, and upholding *taqlid* (traditional codes) against *ijtihad* (discretion).

For Iqbal in his last years, Islam had become a panacea for all the ills of world civilization.³¹ More sinister was the fact that from the very outset of the process of political democratisation, the colonial rulers deliberately encouraged separatist and communal elements in Muslim politics. The reactionary bent of government policy is most clearly demonstrated in the delineation of the separate electorates, as for example, in 1916, when extended to United Provinces local bodies, these were carefully crafted to enfranchise government servants, landlords, and pensioners, and left out professionals, ulema and shopkeepers, that is, those social groups which the rulers knew to be sympathetic to the nationalist cause. Despite its best efforts, however, and despite the communal bitterness, tensions and riots of the mid-twenties, the ‘Muslim interest’ was

³⁰... P Hardy, *op cit*, p. 194, 246

³¹... See W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Chapters 3 and 4

not a consolidated communal entity till as late as 1937, when the Muslim League won only 4.6 per cent of the Muslim votes.

Between the two World Wars, staggered democratisation created a politically powerful 'rural interest', consisting of landlords, petty rentiers and rich peasants. Fazl-I-Hussein's Unionist Party in the Punjab, Fazl-ul-Haq's Krishak Praja Party in Bengal, and Keshavrao Jadhe's revived Satya Shodhak Samaj in Maharashtra were some prominent representations of this new phenomenon.

Brahamanical communalism, on the other hand, expressed the fears and resistance of the hitherto entrenched commercial and urban elites to the vastly increased strength of the countryside. The perceived vacillations of the Congress on this issue led these groups to form political lobbies – the Hindu Swaraksha Sabha in the Punjab, the Bengal Hindu Sabha, the Independent Congress Party (which was an electoral alliance between Madan Mohan Malaviya's Nationalist Party and Moonje's Responsivist Co-operation Party and which provided a platform for many big landed and banking magnates, among them G D Birla, in 1926). All these lobbies took care to maintain close links with local and national level Congress organizations.

The All India Hindu Mahasabha, founded in 1915, defunct till 1922, gradually emerged in the mid-twenties as a coalition of all these groups, attempting to consolidate a broadly defined 'Hindu interest' so as to recruit sections of the lower castes in the cities and the countryside. The decades old doctrine of Hindu Rashtravad fused admirably with the needs of the situation, and was assiduously propagated, despite the patently disastrous consequences it could have in areas populated by masses of Muslim peasants. In fact, so desperate were the urban/commercial interests by the early 1930's that Bhai Parmanand, the Hindu Mahasabha leader, could demand the segregation of the Punjab into three separate provinces in 1933.³²

³²... See Bruce Cleghorn's article, Religion and Politics: the Leadership of the All India Hindu Mahasabha in

The 'siege' mentality of the upper/commercial caste Hindus of the Punjab and Maharashtra was replicated in the communal consciousness of the hitherto dominant but gradually declining Muslim landed and professional elite groups of the United Provinces. It is important to remember the paradox that the concept of Pakistan gained faster polarity with Muslims in UP, than with the masses of Muslim peasants in the areas actually partitioned in 1947. One must stress, however, that partition was a resultant, not merely of communal politics, but of the meshing of the 'Hindu-Muslim' question with the questions of land reform and provincial autonomy, among others.

A thought-provoking article on Brahmanical communalism deals with the animosity towards Gandhi felt by his assassin.³³ Gandhi's politics and version of Hinduism posed a threat, the argument goes, to the elitist Sanskritic culture of Brahmin/Kshatriya orthodoxy most adequately represented by the chitpavans, the caste to which Nathuram Godse belonged. By mobilizing the low-caste, non-Brahmin and commercial cultures in India around a programme of non-violent self-assertion, Gandhi was inverting the patriarchal world-view of the 'descendants of the Peshwas'. For them, he was emasculating Hinduism, rendering it *nirvirya* (unmanly) and *napunsak* (impotent). His endeavour of Hindu-Muslim unity was anathema - Hindu masculinity could only be redeemed by fighting the Muslims and subjecting them, once and for all, to 'majority rule', which meant, Hindu Rashtra. The point is well taken, though it stresses only the 'Shramanic' element in Gandhi's politics. One might add to this the comment that the doctrine of Hindu Rashtra always had the potential of transforming the prospect of freedom and democracy into a nightmare. Community federalism, too, could be transmuted into community separatism.

The oft-repeated statement that communalism, like nationalism, is a purely modern phenomenon becomes problematic upon reflection. Consider, for example, the anti-Semitic outlook, so crucial an ingredient of Nazism. A murderous hatred of Jews, based on horrifying stereotypes - 'devil-worshippers', 'murderers of Christ', etc - was part and

Punjab and Maharashtra, 1920-1939 in *Leadership in South Asia*, B N Pandey(ed).

parcel of orthodox Christianity for centuries, and remained as such despite all the schisms. Can one say, then, that Nazi anti-Semitism was a purely modern phenomenon which used atavistic prejudices for political purposes? (For that matter, can colonialism be comprehended as something totally disjunct from the imperial tradition dating back to Pax Romana?). Nazism *was* modern in that it fulfilled certain functions for the capitalist state. But it would be wrong to view it in purely functional terms, because Nazism also ended up destroying the capitalist state, besides much else.

Simultaneously, it distorted the sense of historical time and created a fantasy world for both rulers and the ruled, peopled by monsters, in which the most horrible events could take on the flavour of banal commonplaces. Fascism is neither wholly modern nor simply archaic – it represents a schizophrenic experience of historical time by people living in any present. To attempt to understand fascism and communalism, we must discard the sharp divisions of history into slabs of ancient, medieval and modern time, and try to comprehend the present as a continuum within which older forms of culture and modes of power fuse with novelty – whether institutional or technological.

The dynamics of communalisms do not emerge from a simple juxtaposition with nationalism. Anti-nationalism can become nationalism and vice-versa. The dominant stream of Muslim communalism could suddenly transform itself into Pakistan nationalism in the short space of a decade. Brahmanical communalism has always seen itself as equivalent to Indian nationalism. Nationalism rarely has that pure, virginal quality about it in which its ideologues like to indulge themselves. Depending on the social forces and processes which articulate it, it can be defensive or imperialist, tolerant or chauvinist, universalist/humanist or racist. It could also, conceivable, contain all these elements, because, after all, total cultural and political homogeneity has never been achieved by any society. German nationalism was social-democratic up to 1848, Prussian-oriented and autocratic in the Bismarckian era, liberal-democratic after the Great War ended in 1918, and racist/expansionist under Nazism. The dominant stream in each phase expressed markedly different social interests.

³³... Ashis Nandy, article – ‘Final Encounter’ in *At the Edge of Psychology*.

Communalism is the Indian version of fascist populism and racist nationalism. *First*, it opposes to the time of the present its own ideal time which is an amalgam of the past and the future – both merging to one another in the myth of communal potency. Muslim communalists spoke of the period of ‘Muslim sovereignty’ as if the medieval Sultanat was the property of every Muslim. Sikh communalists harked back to the reign of Maharaja Ranajit Singh, misrepresenting it as the rule of ‘the Khalsa’.

And Brahmanical fascists, armed with the doctrine of Hindu Rashtra, dreamt of a new and fantastic monolith the ‘majority community’, which, as their political property, would enable them to bludgeon all their enemies into submission. Note V D Savarkar, the president for several years of the Hindu Mahasabha, writing in 1924, “...thirty crores of people, with India as their Fatherland and Holy-land, can dictate their terms to the whole world. A day will come when mankind will have to face the force.” He referred to Hindus as a race (it was not only Hitler who was attracted to Aryan racism), and used to conclude all of his speeches with the cry, “Hinduise all Politics and Militarise Hindudom!” The potency myth, therefore, is integral to all communalists and fascists: The present becomes a mere corridor through which the chosen people traverse history on their way to Supermanhood.

Second, communalism located an internal enemy, deemed to be sapping the strength of the chosen, and makes it the target of mass hatred. Jews and Socialists played this role in Germany and Italy, and Blacks play it today for the South African racists. In South Asia, since India and Pakistan remain *internal* to each other’s ideological self-consciousness, it could be said that Partition disproved the Two Nation Theory. Thus, for Pakistan, the wickedness of Bharat and the Hindus is the necessary condition for its own existence – Bengalis and Ahmadiyas come a poor second. For Brahmanical fascists in India, the internal enemy are the ‘minorities’, primarily the Muslims, who are seen as biologically anti-national, Pakistani agents and an unclean element in the body politic. Pakistan is the externalised form of the internal enemy; the Indian Muslims, the internal shadow of Pakistan. For every type of communal fascism, enemies lurk everywhere, whose physical destruction is the only ultimate guarantee of the safety of

the 'chosen'. Hence, genocide is a logical conclusion for the communalist temperament, and the hundreds of incidents of communal killings and massacres in both colonial and post-colonial India (and Pakistan) demonstrate that inclination.

Third, communalism subverts all humanistic rationality and replaces it with romantic, death worshipping cults of unreason whose political functions are the creation of murder squads, the militarisation of civil society and the inculcation of a fragmented morality based on the racist reduction of the hate objects into sub-humans.

Fourth, communalism, like fascism, is capable of using pseudo-radical slogans to mobilize mass support; and of using democratic institutions to seize power (or fragments of it) and destroy democracy from a position of strength. The numerous occasions on which various brands of communalists made themselves useful to the colonial authorities show up most clearly this anti-democratic nature of communalism, The very early as well as the late history of the Muslim League is an example. We may note, also, V D Savarkar's advice to the Hindu Mahasabha annual session in Kanpur (1942) to perform the 'patriotic' service of enlisting in the colonial armed forces as part of the Hindu Militarisation movement, and to "continue to capture all centres of political power, from the Central Executive Committee, Legislatures, Defence Committees, Municipalities, Ministries in the civic part of Government just as on the military side...the men who come to occupy these centres of power must be either elected by the Hindu Mahasabha or supported by it...in no case should a Hindu be trusted who belongs to the pseudo-nationalistic Congress school...who glories in betraying Hindu rights to the Muslims."³⁴

Finally, communalism politicises the underworld, links together goondas and politicians, legitimises criminal violence and institutionalises all these phenomena in stable organizations, creating the symbiosis between the state and the bestial personality which is the hallmark of fascism. Its principal victim is humanity itself.

³⁴... The first quote from Savarkar is from *Hindutva*, an extract of which is contained in de Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp.881-887. The second is from his 1942 presidential speech, published by the Hindu Mahasabha.

Nothing illustrates the binary unity of Indian communal politics better than a comparison of some of its historical myths. Two quotations below give interpretations of a particular period of Indian history:

Akbar succeeded in establishing a strong empire...in retrospect it may be said that during the sixteenth century 'Hindustan' disappeared completely and was absorbed in 'Pakistan'. Under Aurangzeb the "Pakistan" spirit gathered in strength. This evoked the opposition of the Hindus and Aurangzeb had to carry out long drawn-out wars against the militant Marathas...During the eighteenth century, the crisis in Mughal India deepened, and the conflict between the Muslims and the Hindus gained in intensity. The militant Marathas spearheaded the movement for the resurgence of Hinduism and came to knock at the very gates of Delhi

Just take up the map of India around 1600 AD. The Muslims ruled all over Hindustan unchallengeably. It was a veritable Pakistan realized not only in this province or that, but all over India. Hindustan as such was simply wiped out. Then open the map of India about 1700 to 1798 AD and what do you see? The Hindu forces are marching triumphantly throughout India. The very Mogul throne at Delhi is smashed to pieces literally by a hammer Sadashiv Rao Bhao, the Generalissimo of the Marathas!

Both quotations are gross communalist distortions of late medieval history. Both demonstrate that for their authors, the communal conflict, "Pakistan" versus 'Hindustan', was actually the tension between competing autocratic traditions, *each of which need the other* to justify itself. Both present exactly the same version of their theme, but ironically the two quotations are separated by more than four decades in time and a geopolitical frontier.

The first quote is from a textbook for intermediate level students, called Pakistan Studies, and published in Lahore in 1982. In the author's (M.D. Zafar) preface the first

objective of the 'New Education Policy' is quoted – “to inculcate a true spirit of patriotism, love and affection for our country, religion and culture through the clear understanding of the ideology of Pakistan.’ Clearly, the fact that the state needs to produce such a ludicrous distortion of history for the benefit of young minds is proof enough that the ‘ideology of Pakistan’ is in deep crisis.

The second quote is from the presidential speech by ‘Veer’ (hero) Savarkar in 1942, quoted earlier. It is a fact that the militaristic delusions of the Veer infect the minds of large numbers of Indians, including some in positions of authority. In the same speech, he continued; “The Pakistan actually realized by the Muslims was entombed and out of it rose up once more Hindustan, resurrected and triumphant. The conquering Muslim had to eat the humble pie in the long end (sic) and got so completely crushed and weaned of his dominating dreams that even today in his heart of hearts he shudders to think of his fate as soon as he sees the probability of the consolidated strength of the overwhelming Hindu majority in the land.” Can we deny that the widespread currency of such beliefs, whether overtly or covertly held, was just as much responsible for the partition of India as the separatism of the Muslim League?

The doctrine of Hindu nationalism is one of the most pernicious dogmas ever invented in the long history of Brahmanical sophistry. A synthetic tradition can be the basis for a religion of love. Converted into a politics of uniformity, it can become the wellspring of fascism. European civilization could have ‘synthesised’ the Jews by discarding its classical anti-Semitism; instead, the Nazi regime synthesized them into soap and leather. The ancient tradition and philosophies of agglomeration became the flags of intolerance; and the supercession of contradiction began to mean the destruction of difference. The appearance of ‘Hindu Rashtra’ in the conceptual universe of the nationalist intelligentsia meant the end of the possibility of Akhand Bharat (undivided India), because the people of India were not prepared to function as fascist hordes.

The fulcrum of Nathuram Godse’s entire self-exculpation at the Gandhi murder trial in 1948 was this one statement – “I was determined to prove to Gandhiji that the Hindu

too, could be intolerant when his honour was insulted.”³⁵ How the Brahmanical tradition defines and defends its honour will be fully revealed only when the social history of the ‘untouchables’ and tribal peoples begins to be written ‘from below’.

But it is time to stop defining Indian secularism as if it meant an arithmetical total of communally defined entities. If Bhindranwale has superseded Guru Nanak, if Pakistan is the model for a truly Islamic society, and if the activities of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Shiv Sena and RSS amount to a Hindu renaissance (and I shudder to wait for the Reformation), then we had better recognize that the putrefaction of religious traditions is just as much a part of an all-round social crisis as, say, the debt bomb or the arms race. Deprived of the refreshing oxygen of a genuine cultural and social revolution, Indian nationalism is now choking on its own poison. Since the moral fabric is so completely fragmented as to render even the quality of innocence into communally divided categories, the very first precept of any new secularism must be the inculcation of a basic respect for human life.

With the kind of ideological diet quoted above, if there are Pakistanis who can be moved by Balraj Sahni’s role in *Garam Hawa* (the film on Partition); if people in Bangladesh remember Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar when they speak their mother tongue; if a single Hindu Nationalist knows and appreciates the work of the writer Sa’adat Hasan Manto, who so steadfastly refused to accept Partition; and if Indians today can spare a thought for that monument of the national movement, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who needs a passport to enter his own country, some hope still remains.

For this student of history, the most poignant symbol of Indian nationhood remains the madman from the Lahore asylum, tortured by the prospect of ‘repatriation’, who fell in the no-man’s land on a freshly drawn border, his head pointing towards Pakistan and his feet towards Hindustan, and who attained sanity when India went insane.³⁶

³⁵... Nathuram Godse, *May it Please Your Honour*, published in 1977 by Gopal Godse.

³⁶... The reference to the ‘madman’ above, is literary, and is taken from the short story named *Toba Tek Singh*, by Manto